

More Letters

Treating Arthritic Pain with Ginger

Editor:

On March 14 our local newspaper had a report on treating arthritis. I think that it may have been an AP report, quoting a professor of rheumatology at a University in Michigan. It put down things such as evening primrose oil and the thrust of it was that if one had rheumatoid arthritis, one is just somewhat out of luck. I sent the following letter to the local newspaper. It was not published, I rather expect that it was shown to a local rheumatologist who said it was the bunk. If you may be so kind as to give this letter the light of day and in the process, bring a degree of pain relief to some patients with arthritis.

I am age 88 and have been an amputee since 1929 when I lost my left leg in a motorcycle accident. From that day onward, I have been plagued with episodes of painful spasms at the severed nerve endings. These episodes are excruciatingly painful. The way out was to take about 25 aspirin in a short period of time. I would get sick from too much aspirin. When that happened, it was a good sign. The spasms were about to end. I feel fortunate that I did not kill myself with an overdose of aspirin.

I have been almost completely free from these painful episodes now for over ten years. I read a report in the British medical journal *Medical Hypotheses*, 1989, vol. 29, pp 25-29. Two doctors from India were at the hospital of Odense University in Denmark. The article was by R.C. Srivastava and T. Mustafa and

the title of the article was "Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) in Treating Rheumatic Disorders." Ginger is an important medication in the very old Ayurvedic and Tibb system of medicine in India dating from prehistory. They were telling how ginger is effective in treating both osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis but especially, rheumatoid arthritis. They gave a few cases of success in so doing. Its effectiveness in treating these two types of arthritis was said to be due to its anti-inflammatory effect.

I assumed that the nerve ending spasms I was having were caused by an inflammatory reaction. I began taking a heaping teaspoon per day of ground ginger bought in a food market. I mixed it in a glass of milk and in almost no time it abolished this problem that had plagued me for over 60 years. This problem has remained abolished now for over 10 years and I take my ginger almost every day.

It is not all that easy to understand but I will try to explain the anti-inflammatory action of ginger. We get a fatty acid in meat called arachidonic acid. Adult humans can make a little of it but not much. It plays a major role in arthritic pain that is caused by inflammatory action. It is acted on by two enzymes, the first one is cyclo-oxygenase. It converts arachidonic acid into several of what are called 2 series prostaglandins. One is a pain prostaglandin, another is involved in an inflammatory reaction. Aspirin inhibits cyclo-oxygenase and hence pain. Insofar as the cyclo-oxygenase produce prostaglandins, it is both anti-inflammatory and anti-pain.

The other enzyme acting on arachidonic acid is lipoxygenase and it converts arachidonic acid to the super inflammatory 4 series leukotrienes. Aspirin will not inhibit lipoxygenase. As it tends to prevent arachidonic acid from flowing into the cyclo-oxygenase produced prostaglandins, more of it will tend to flow into the highly inflammatory leukotrienes. As a result aspirin is often proinflammatory and with some asthma patients, it will cause an asthma attack.

Ginger is said to inhibit both cyclo-oxygenase and lipoxygenase so it may be truly anti-inflammatory. The name of the game in any anti-inflammatory treatment is to inhibit lipoxygenase.

The cost of a teaspoon a day of ginger is next to nothing, and unlike aspirin it

seems to have no harmful side effects. Here it is suggested that patients suffering from either osteoarthritis or rheumatoid arthritis may care to try ginger. Rheumatoid arthritis is caused by our immune cells attacking our joints, however in so doing, they cause the pain and joint destruction by an inflammatory action. It could be that patients suffering from rheumatoid arthritis may be in for a pleasant surprise if they would try ginger.

In your article an arthritic patient was quoted as saying that evening primrose oil was of no benefit. Gamma linolenic acid in evening primrose oil acts to prevent arachidonic acid from being acted on by both cyclo-oxygenase and lipoxygenase and as such should be anti-inflammatory. It also inhibits lipoxygenase. It is likely that to have any benefit in treating arthritic pain, one would have to take about five capsules a day.

Vegetarians get almost no arachidonic in diet. I have never heard any suggestion that vegetarians suffer less arthritic pain but if looked into, there may be something to this line of thought.

It is my thought that ginger added to milk improves the flavor of milk. I hope that some patients suffering from arthritic pain may read this letter, try ginger and report back to me.

Wayne Martin
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Informal Notes on A Case of Fibromyalgia Associated with Giardia

Editor:

Fibromyalgia is described as "chronic pain in muscles and soft tissues surrounding joints," according to *Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary*,¹ and its origin cannot always be determined. In some cases, at least, fibromyalgia may be a symptom of something else, and successful identification and treatment of the underlying cause may result in considerable improvement. By way of

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illustration I am reminded of a young woman encountered about 20 years ago whose situation demonstrates that possibility.

The young woman had been diagnosed with fibromyositis/fibromyalgia. She suffered in addition from recurrent bouts of gastrointestinal distress (including abdominal swelling and tenderness), and Hashimoto's thyroiditis (a type of autoimmune hypothyroidism). She reported that her symptoms began slightly more than two years previously, and that she had been getting steadily worse since then.

A review of events prior to the onset of symptoms revealed that she and her husband had gone camping in a forested area about three years earlier, and while there she had drunk stream water. She also reported that her husband had been diagnosed and successfully treated for a parasitic infection in recent years. I suggested that it might not be a bad idea for her to consult her husband's parasitologist in case she too, might be infected with a parasite. She did so, and after careful testing, the physician diagnosed and treated her successfully for giardia infection. She subsequently improved greatly and when last heard from was in training to accompany her husband on overseas employment.

In this young woman's case there appeared to be a clear association between the giardia infection and her fibromyalgia. A 'leaky gut' caused by the parasite's invasion of the intestinal wall could have allowed toxins from the gut to pass into the body's circulation and thence to storage in body tissues, including muscles, resulting in the symptoms associated with fibromyalgia. Support for this reasoning includes:

1. Giardia can cause not only intestinal inflammation, but also malabsorption and injury to the surface layer of the intestinal mucosa, particularly in severe cases.²

2. The intestinal wall appears to be, under some conditions (including injury) permeable to bacterial and other toxins and various ingested antigens; such absorption might eventually result in systemic disease.³

3. Factors affecting intestinal absorption include type of intestinal flora present; alteration of gastrointestinal motility; and nature, solubility and concentration of the toxins.⁴ It is known that skin absorption of toxins is enhanced by abrasion or other skin damage.⁵ Damage to the

intestinal lining (from such factors as infection, radiation, chemical toxins, mechanical injury, or presence of parasites) could likewise enhance absorption of toxins into the system.

4. Once absorbed, toxins may be stored in various parts of the body, and may cause problems at the storage sites. In some cases stored toxins, whatever their source, might induce an inflammatory response or other immune system disturbance, or interfere with cellular metabolism and tissue function.⁶

The Hashimoto's thyroiditis might also have been contributed to by toxins permeating a leaky gut. Small molecules (from drugs/pharmaceuticals, chemicals such as pesticides, or even toxins produced by microorganisms) which are too small to elicit an immune reaction by themselves, may do so if they bind to some of the body's own molecules.⁷

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PAIN

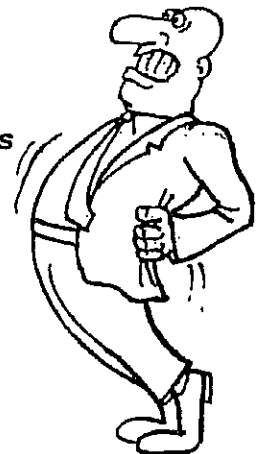
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